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RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 4017
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM 3314
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RHMFISS/SECNAV WASHINGTON DC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L OSLO 000489

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/02/2018

TAGS: [PREL](#) [RS](#) [NO](#)

SUBJECT: NERVOUS ABOUT RUSSIA, NORWAY STRESSING HIGH NORTH
VULNERABILITIES TO ALLIES

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Kevin M. Johnson
for reasons 1.4 b and d

[¶1.](#) (C) Summary. Russian experts in Norway have a realistic and well informed view of negative trends in Russia but public statements by the GON will continue to stress Norway's positive bilateral relationship with Russia. After Georgia the GON will stress the potential for conflict in the High North region and the need for allied attention to this region. End Summary

[¶2.](#) (C) Despite great efforts to balance public criticism of Russia with positive comments about the bilateral relationship, Norway views Russia with a clear lens, fully aware of negative trends and potential threats to Norway's interests. Public statements by GON officials routinely stress the positive bilateral relationship and emphasize that Norway approaches Russia both as a neighbor (uniformly stressing the positive) and as a member of the wider European community (at times criticizing Russian actions, but primarily arguing for dialogue and inclusion). Such public cautiousness should not give the impression that the GON is nave or lacking in understanding of negative trends in Russia. It does, however, indicate potential clashes with USG views on how to respond to negative trends.

[¶3.](#) (C) During Ambassador Volker's recent visit to Oslo, Robert Kvile, acting head of the High North, Resources and Russia section, briefed on Norway's analysis of Russian foreign and domestic priorities. Volker was impressed by this analysis and stated that he had not seen such clear analysis of Russia in most European capitals.

Norway - Russia bilateral relationship

[¶4.](#) (C) Kvile started by explaining the unique aspects of Norway's relations with Russia. Since the end of the Cold War, Norway has worked at improving their Barents interactions with Russia and has been successful in creating cooperative relationships in environmental cleanup, nuclear safety, fisheries management and people-to-people exchanges. This close relationship impacts the wider relationship as the GON does not want to throw away the hard earned progress in bilateral relations (or damage the potential future cooperation on energy development or agreement on a maritime border) for events elsewhere. Norway also puts great stock on its thousand year history of peace with Russia and views the likelihood of conflict with Russia low, although events in Georgia are raising concerns.

Russian Internal Developments

[¶5.](#) (C) Having explained the rationale for the GON's

traditionally relatively timid public posture Kvile then painted a detailed picture of the negative developments in Russia. Kvile characterized analysis of Russia's domestic developments as largely based on wishful thinking. The Russian use of force in Georgia is the first since the 1990s and shows who has the upper hand in the Kremlin, namely the Putin-security oriented forces. The military has great influence as does the FSB which is taking over the role formerly played by the communist party. For these forces control of politics and the economy is the main agenda. Pluralism or democracy, or even the interests of the Russian people, are not things that the Kremlin is interested in. Kvile said that the GON is concerned when they look into the future and ask if the Russian trend to use force could spread. An obvious area of concern is on Svalbard where Norway and Russia have different interpretations of the Spitzbergen treaty.

Norway's Strategy

16. (C) The GON is currently trying to grapple with the question on what price Russia should pay for their misbehavior in Georgia. For the GON it would be very hard to cancel something in the High North as it would hurt Norway more than Russia. Kvile stated that the general GON policy for the future was to increase Norwegian presence in the High North, diversify activities in the region and increase the level of knowledge about the Barents region within Europe and with allies. To this end the GON has bilateral dialogues with the U.S., UK, France, Germany and Canada on High North issues. Energy resource exploitation, opening of new shipping and transit corridors (as the Northeast Passage becomes ice free) and the issues of resources on or around Svalbard will ensure continued Norwegian attention to the region (and from the perspective of the GON hopefully wider). Norway hopes its own and other western attention to the High North will make it harder for Russia to obtain its objectives on Svalbard or elsewhere in the region with the use or threat of brute force. Separately, Defense Ministry sources mentioned that the Defense Minister will attempt to highlight the Barents Area as a potential area of conflict with Russia during the upcoming fall meetings of NATO Defense Ministers.

WHITNEY